A Silent Wooing

BY JOHN GALSWORTHY

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On the 1st of February, 1924, Jon Forsyte, convalescing from the 'flu, was sitting in the lounge of a hotel at Camden, S. C., with his bright hair slowly rising on his scalp. He was reading about a lynching.

A voice behind him said:

"Will you join our picnic over at those old-time mounds to-day?"

Looking up he saw a young acquaintance called Francis Wilmot, who came from farther south.

"Very glad to. Who's going?"

"Why, just Mr. and Mrs. Pulmore Harrison, and that English novelist Gurdon Minho, and the Blair girls and their friends, and my sister Anne and I. You could ride over horseback, if you want exercise."

"All right; they've got some new horses in this morning from Columbia."

"Why, that's fine! My sister and I'll ride horseback too, and some of the Blair girls. The Harrisons can tote the others."

"'Tote,'" said Jon. "Good word, that. I say, this is a pretty bad case of lynching."

The young man to whom he spoke leaned in the window. Jon admired his face, as of ivory, with dark hair and eyes, and narrow nose and lips, and his lissome free attitude.

"All you Britishers go off the deep-end when you read of a lynching. You haven't got the negro problem up where you are at Southern Pines. They don't have it any to speak of, in North Carolina."

"No, and I don't profess to understand it. But I can't see why negroes shouldn't be tried the same as white men. There may be cases where you've got to shoot at sight; but I don't see how you can defend mob law. Once you catch a man, he ought to be tried properly."

"We're not taking any chances with that particular kind of trouble."

"But if a man isn't tried, how can you tell he's guilty?"

"Well, we'd sooner do without an innocent darky now and again, than risk our women."

"I should have thought killing a man for a thing he hadn't done was worse than anything."

"Maybe, in Europe. But not here. Things are in the large, still."

"What do they think about lynching in the North?"

"They squeal a bit, but they've no call to. If we've got negroes, they've got the Reds, and they surely have a wholesale way with them."

Jon Forsyte tilted back his rocking-chair, with a puzzled frown.

"I reckon there's too much space in this country, still," said Francis Wilmot; "a man has all the chances to get off. So where we feel strong about a thing, we take the law into our own hands."

"Well, every country to its own fash-

ions. What are these mounds we're going to?"

"Old Indian remains that go 'way back thousands of years, they say. You haven't met my sister? She only came last night."

"No. What time do we start?"

"Noon; it's about an hour's ride by the woods."

At noon then, in riding-kit, Jon came out to the five horses, for more than one of the Blair girls had elected to ride. He started between them, Francis Wilmot going ahead with his sister.

The Blair girls were young and pretty with a medium-colored, short-faced, well-complexioned, American prettiness, of a type to which he had become accustomed during the two and a half years he had spent in the United States. They were at first extremely silent, and then extremely vocal. They rode astride, and very well. Jon learned that they, as well as the givers of the picnic, Mr. and Mrs. Pulmore Harrison, abode in Long Island. They asked him many questions about England, to which Jon, who had left it at the age of nineteen, invented many answers. He began to look longingly between his horse's ears at Francis Wilmot and his sister, cantering ahead in a silence that, from a distance, seemed extremely restful. Their way led through pine woods —of trees spindly and sparse, and over a rather sandy soil; the sunlight was clear and warm, the air still crisp. Jon rode a single-footing bay horse, and felt as one feels on the first day of recovered health.

The Blair girls wished to know what he thought of the English novelist—they were dying to see a real highbrow. Jon had read only one of his books, and of the characters therein could only remember a cat. The Blair girls had read none; but they had heard that his cats were just too cunning.

Francis Wilmot, reining up in front, pointed at a large mound which certainly seemed to be unnaturally formed. They all reined up, looked at it for two minutes in silence, judged it was 'very interesting,' and rode on. In a hollow the occupants of two cars were disembarking food. Jon led the horses away to tether them alongside the horses of Wilmot and his sister.

"My sister," said Francis Wilmot.

"Mr. Forsyte."

She looked at Jon, and Jon looked at her. She was slim but distinctly firm, in a long dark-brown coat and breeches and boots; her hair was bobbed and dark under a soft brown felt hat. Her face was pale, rather browned, and had a sort of restrained eagerness—the brow broad and clear, the nose straight and slightly sudden, the mouth unreddened, rather wide and pretty. But what struck Jon were her eyes, which were exactly his idea of a water-nymph's. They slanted a little, and were steady and brown and enticing; whether there was ever such a slight squint in them he could not tell, but if there were it was an improvement. He felt shy. Neither of them spoke.

Francis Wilmot remarked: "I reckon I'm hungry." And they walked side by side toward the eatables.

Jon said suddenly to the sister:

"You've just come, then, Miss Wilmot?"

"Yes, Mr. Forsyte."

"Where from?"

"From Naseby. It's 'way down between Charleston and Savannah."

"Oh! Charleston; I liked Charleston."

"Anne likes Savannah best," said Francis Wilmot.

Anne nodded. She was not talkative, it seemed, though her voice had sounded pleasant in small quantities.

"It's kind of lonely where we live," said Francis. "Mostly darkies. Anne's never seen an Englishman to speak to."

Anne smiled. Jon also smiled. Neither pursued the subject. They arrived at the eatables, spread in a manner calculated to give the maximum of muscular and digestive exertion. Mrs. Pulmore Harrison, a lady of forty or so and defined features, was seated with her feet turned up; next to her, Gurdon Minho, the English novelist, had his legs in a more reserved position; and then came quantities of seated girls, all with pretty unreserved legs; Mr. Pulmore Harrison, somewhat apart, was pursing a small mouth over the cork of a large bottle. Jon and the Wilmots also sat down. The picnic had begun.

Jon soon realized that everybody was expecting Gurdon Minho to say something beyond "Yes," "Really!" "Ah!" "Quite!" This did not occur. The celebrated novelist was at first almost painfully attentive to what everybody else said, and then seemed to go into a coma. Jon felt a patriotic disappointment, for he himself was, if anything, even more silent. He could see that, among the three Blair girls and their two girl friends, a sort of conspiracy was brewing, to quiz the silent English in the privacy of the future. Francis Wilmot's speechless sister was a comfort to him; he felt that she would neither be entitled nor inclined to join that conspiracy. He took refuge in handing victuals and was glad when the period of eating on constricted stomachs was over. Picnics were like Christmas Day, better in the future and the past than in the present. After the normal period of separation into genders, the baskets were repacked, and all resorted to their vehicles. The two cars departed for another mound said to be two miles off. Francis Wilmot and the two Blair girls judged they would get back and watch the polo. Jon asked Anne Wilmot which she wished to do. She elected to see the other mound.

They mounted and pursued a track through the woods in silence. At last Jon said:

"Do you like picnics?"

"I certainly do not."

"Nor do I. But riding?"

"I just adore it more than anything in the world."

"More than dancing?"

"Surely. Riding and swimming."

"Ah! I thought—" And he was silent.

"What did you think?"

"Well, I thought somehow you were a good swimmer."

"Why?"

Jon said with embarrassment: "By your eyes—"

"What! Are they fishy?"

Jon laughed. "Not exactly. They're like a water-nymph's."

"I don't just know if that's a compliment."

"Of course it is."

"I thought nymphs weren't respectable."

"Oh! *Water*-nymphs—very! Shy, of course."

"Do you have many in England?"

"No. As a matter of fact I've never seen one before."

"Then how do you know?"

"Just a general sense of what's fitting."

"I suppose you had a classical education. Don't you all have that in England?"

"Far from it."

"And how do you like America, Mr. Forsyte?"

"Very much. I get homesick sometimes."

"I'd love to travel."

"You never have?"

She shook her head. "I just stay at home and look after things. But I reckon we'll have to sell the old home—cotton doesn't pay any more."

"I grow peaches near Southern Pines, you know, up in North Carolina; that's paying at present."

"D'you live there alone?"

"No; with my mother."

"Is she English?"

"Yes."

"Have you a father?"

"He died four years ago."

"Francis and I have been orphans ten years."

"I wish you'd both come and stay with us some day; my mother would be awfully glad."

"Is she like you?"

Jon laughed. "No. She's beautiful."

The eyes regarded him gravely, the lips smiled faintly.

"I'd just love to come, but Francis and I can't ever be away together."

"But," said Jon, "you're both here."

"We go back to-morrow; I wanted to see Camden." The eyes resumed their steady consideration of Jon's face. "Won't you come back with us and see our home—it's old. Francis would like to have you come."

"Do you always know what your brother would like?"

"Surely."

"That must be jolly. But do you really mean you want me to come?"

"I certainly do."

"I'd enjoy it awfully; I hate hotels. I mean—well, you know—" But as *he* didn't, he was not so sure that she did.

She touched her horse, and that single-footing animal broke into a canter.

Along the alleys of the eternal pine wood the sun was in their eyes; a warmed scent rose from pine-needles, gum, and herbs; the going was sandy and soft; the horses in good mood. Jon felt happy. This girl had strange eyes, enticing; and she rode better even than the Blair girls.

"I suppose all the English ride well?" she said.

"Most do, when they ride at all; but we don't ride much nowadays."

"I'd love to see England; our folk came from England in 1700—Worcestershire. Where is that?"

"It's our Middle West," said Jon. "But as unlike as ever you can imagine. It's a fruit-growing county — very pretty; white timbered houses, pastures, orchards, woods, green hills. I went there walking one holiday with a school friend."

"It sounds just lovely. Our ancestors were Roman Catholics. They had a place called Naseby; that's why we call ours Naseby. But my grandmother was French Creole, from Louisiana. Is it true that in England they think Creoles have negro blood in them?"

"We're very ignorant," said Jon. "*I* know the Creoles are the old French and Spanish families. You both look as if you had French blood."

"Francis does. Do you think we've passed that mound? We've come all of four miles, and I thought it was only two."

"Does it matter? The other mound was rather overrated."

The lips smiled; she didn't ever quite laugh, it seemed.

"What Indians hereabouts?" asked Jon.

"I'm not too sure; Seminoles, if any,

I think. But Francis says these mounds would be from 'way back before the present tribes. What made you come to America, Mr. Forsyte?"

Jon bit his lip. To give the reason—family feud—broken love-affair—was not exactly possible.

"I went first to British Columbia; but I didn't get on too well. Then I heard of peaches in North Carolina."

"But why did you leave England?"

"I suppose I just wanted to see the world."

"Yes," she said. It was a very quiet but comprehending sound; Jon was the more gratified, because she had not comprehended. The image of his first love did not often haunt him now—had not for a year or more. He had been so busy with his peaches. Besides, Holly had written that Fleur had a boy. He said, suddenly: "I think we ought to turn. Look at the sun." The sun, indeed, was well down behind the trees.

"My—yes!"

Jon turned his steed. "Let's gallop, it'll be down in half an hour; and there's no moon till late."

They galloped back along the track. The sun went down even faster than he had thought, the air grew cold, the light gray. Jon reined up suddenly.

"I'm awfully sorry; I don't believe we're on the track we came by from the picnic. I feel we've gone off to the right. The tracks are all alike, and these horses only came in from Columbia yesterday; they don't know the country any more than we do."

The girl laughed. "We'll be lost."

"M'm! That'll be no joke in these woods. Don't they ever end?"

"I reckon not, in these parts. It's an adventure."

"Yes; but you'll catch cold. It's jolly cold at night."

"And you've had 'flu!"

"Oh! That's all right. Here's a track to the left. Shall we go on, or shall we take it?"

"Take it."

They cantered on. It was too dark now for galloping, and soon too dark for cantering. And the track wound on and on.

"This is a pretty business," said Jon; "I *am* sorry." He peered toward her riding beside him, and could just see her smile.

"Why! It's lots of fun."

He was glad she thought so, but he could not see it.

"I *have* been an ass. Your brother'll be pretty sick with me."

"He'll know I'm with you."

"If we only had a compass. We may be out all night at this rate. Here's another fork! Gosh, it *is* going to be dark."

And almost as he spoke the last of the light failed; he could barely see her five yards away. He came up close alongside, and she touched his sleeve.

"Don't worry," she said; "that spoils it."

Shifting his reins, he gave her hand a squeeze.

"You're splendid, Miss Wilmot."

"Oh! do call me Anne. Surnames seem kind of chilly when you're lost."

"Thank you very much. My name's Jon. Without an h, you know—short for Jolyon."

"Jolyon—Jon; I like it."

"Anne's always been my favorite name. Shall we stop till the moon rises, or ride on?"

"When will the moon rise?"

"About ten, I think, judging from last night. And it'll be nearly full. But it's hardly six yet."

"Let's ride on and leave it to the horses."

"Right! Only, if they make for anywhere I'm pretty sure it'll be toward Columbia, which must be miles and miles."

They pursued the narrow track at a foot's pace. It was really dark now.

Jon said: "Are you cold? You'd be warmer walking. I'll go ahead; stick close enough to see me."

He went ahead, and soon dismounted, feeling cold himself; there was utter silence among unending trees, and no light. It was weird.

"I'm cold now," said the voice of Anne. "I'll get off, too."

They had trailed on perhaps half an hour like this, leading their horses, and almost feeling their way when Jon said:

"Look! There's some sort of a clearing here! And what's that blackness on the left?"

"It's a mound."

"Which mound, I wonder? The one we saw, or the other, or neither?"

"I reckon we'd better stop here till the moon rises, then maybe we'll see which it is, and know our way."

"You're right. There'll be swamps, I expect. I'll tether the horses to leeward, and we'll try and find a nook. It *is* cold."

He tethered the horses out of the wind, and, turning back, found her beside him.

"It's creepy."

"We'll find a snug place, and sit down."

He put his hand through her arm, and they moved round the foot of the mound.

"Here," said Jon, suddenly; "they've been digging. This'll be sheltered." He felt the ground—dry enough. "Let's squat here and talk."

Side by side, with their backs to the wall of the excavated hollow, they lighted cigarettes, and sat listening to the silence. But for a snuffle or soft stamp now and then from the horses, there wasn't a sound. Trees and wind, both, were too sparse for melody, and nothing but their two selves and their horses seemed alive. A sprinkle of stars in a very dark sky, and the deeper blackness of the pine stems, was all they could see. Ah! and the glowing tips of their cigarettes, and each other's faces vaguely illumined, now and then, thereby.

"I don't expect you'll ever forgive me for this," said Jon, gloomily.

"Why! I'm just loving it."

"Very sweet of you to say so; but you must be awfully cold. Look here—have my coat!"

He had begun to take it off when she said:

"If you do that I'll run out into the woods and get really lost."

Jon resumed his coat.

"It might have been one of those Blair girls," he said.

"Would you rather?"

"For your sake of course. Not for my own—no, indeed!"

They were looking round at each other so that the tips of their cigarettes were almost touching. Just able to see her eyes, he had a very distinct impulse to put his arm round her. It seemed the natural and proper thing to do, but of course it was not 'done'!

"Have some chocolate," she said.

Jon ate a very little. The chocolate should be reserved for her!

"This is a real adventure. It *is* black. I'd have been scared alone—seems kind of spooky here."

"Spirits of the old Indians," muttered Jon. "Only I don't believe in spirits."

"You would if you'd had a colored mammy."

"Did you have one?"

"Surely, with a voice as soft as mushmelon. We have one old darky still, who was a slave as a boy. He's the best of all the negroes round—nearly eighty, with quite white wool."

"Your father couldn't have been in the Civil War, could he?"

"No; my two grandfathers, and my great-grandfather."

"And how old are you, Anne?"

"Nineteen."

"I'm twenty-three."

"Tell me about your home in England."

"I haven't one now." He began an expurgated edition of his youth, and it seemed to him that she listened beautifully. Then he asked for her story in return; and, while she told it, he wondered whether he liked her voice or not. It dwelled and it slurred, but it was soft and had great flavor. When she had finished her simple tale, for she had hardly been away from home, there was silence, till Jon said:

"It's half past seven only. I'll go and see that the horses are all right, then perhaps you could get a snooze."

He moved round the foot of the mound till he came to the horses, and stayed a little talking to them and stroking their noses. A feeling warm and protective stirred within him. This was a nice child, and a brave one, and a face to remember, with lots behind it. Suddenly, he heard her voice, low and as if pretending not to call: "Jon, oh! Jon!" He felt his way back through the darkness. Her hands were stretched out.

"It is spooky! That funny rustling! I've got creeps down my back!"

"The wind's got up a bit. Let's sit back to back—it'll keep you warm. Or, look here, I'll sit against the wall, if you lean up against me you could go to sleep. It's only two hours now—we can ride on by moonlight."

They took up the suggested postures, her back against his side, and her head in the hollow of his arm and shoulder.

"Comfy?"

"Surely. It stops the creeps. Aren't I too heavy, though?"

"Not a bit," said Jon.

They smoked and talked a little more. The stars were brighter now, and their eyes more accustomed to the darkness. And they were grateful for each other's warmth. Jon enjoyed the scent, as of hay, that rose from her hair not far below his nose. Then came a long silence, while the warm protective feeling grew and grew within him. He would have liked to slip his arms round and hold her closer. But, of course, he did not. It was, however, as much as he could do to remain a piece of warmth impersonal enough for her to recline against. This was the very first time since he left England that he had felt an inclination to put his arms round any one, so badly burnt had he been in that old affair. The wind rose, talked in the trees, died away again; the stillness was greater than ever. He was very wide-awake, and it seemed curious to him that she should sleep, for, surely, she was asleep—so still. The stars twinkled, and he gazed up at them. His limbs began to ache and twitch, and suddenly he realized that she was no more asleep than he. She slowly turned her head till he could see her eyes, grave, enticing.

"I'm too heavy," she said, and raised herself; but his arm restored her.

"Not a bit; so long as you're warm and comfy."

Her head settled in again; and the

vigil was resumed. They talked a little now, of nothing important, and he thought: 'It's queer—one could live months knowing people and not know them half so well as we shall know each other now.'

Again a long silence fell; but this time his arm was round her, it was more comfortable so, for both of them. And Jon began to have the feeling that it would be inadvisable for the moon to rise. Had she that feeling too? He wondered. But if she had, the moon in its courses paid no attention. For suddenly he became conscious that it was there, behind the trees somewhere lurking, a curious kind of stilly glimmer creeping about the air, along the ground, in and out of the tree-stems.

"The moon!" he said. She did not stir, and his heart beat rather fast. So! She did not want the moon to rise, any more than he! And slowly the creeping glimmer became light, and, between the tree-stems, stole, invading their bodies till they were visible. And still they sat, unstirring, as if afraid to break a spell. The moon gained power and a cold glory, and rose above the trees; the world was alive once more. Jon thought: 'Could I kiss her?' And at once recoiled. As if she would want! But as though she divined his thought, she turned her head, and her eyes looked into his. Then Jon said:

"I'm in charge of you!"

Her answer was a little sigh, and she got up. They stood, stretching, gazing into the whitened mysterious wood.

"Look, Anne! It *is* the mound. There's the path down to the hollow where we had the picnic. Now we can find the way all right."

"Yes," a sound he could not interpret. But they went toward the horses, untethered them, and mounted. Between them, they would remember the way now; and they set forth. They rode side by side.

Jon said:

"Well, that'll be something to remember."

"Yes, I shall always remember it."

They said no more, except to consult about the way, but this was soon clear, and they cantered. They came out on the polo ground close to the hotel.

"You go in and relieve your brother's mind. I'll take the horses round, and then come on."

When he entered the hotel lounge Francis Wilmot, still in riding-clothes, was alone. His expression was peculiar, not exactly hostile, but certainly not friendly.

"Anne's gone up," he said. "I reckon you haven't much bump of locality. You surely had me scared."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Jon humbly; "I forgot the horses were new to the country."

"Well!" said Francis Wilmot, and shrugged his shoulders. Jon looked at the young man steadily.

"You don't think that I got bushed on purpose? Because you look as if you did."

Again Francis Wilmot shrugged his shoulders.

"Forgive me," said Jon; "but aren't you forgetting that your sister's a lady, and that one doesn't behave like a cad with a lady?"

Francis Wilmot did not answer; he went to a window and stood looking out. Jon felt very angry. He sat down on the arm of a long chair, feeling suddenly extremely tired. He sat there looking at the ground, frowning heavily. Damn the fellow! Had he been bullying Anne? If he had—! A voice behind him said: "I reckon I didn't

mean it. I certainly am sorry. It was just the scare. Shake hands!"

Jon stretched out his own impulsively, and they shook hands, looking straight into each other's eyes.

"You must be about through," said Francis Wilmot. "Come on to my room; I've gotten a flask. I've given Anne a dram."

They went up. Jon sat in the only chair, Francis Wilmot on the bed.

"Anne tells me she's asked you to come home with us to-morrow. I surely hope you will."

"I should simply love to."

"That's fine!"

They drank, talked a little, smoked.

"Good night!" said Jon, suddenly, "or I shall go to sleep here."

They shook hands again, and Jon staggered to his room. He fell asleep at once.

They travelled next day, all three, through Columbia and Charleston, to the Wilmots' place. It stood in the bend of a red river, with cotton-fields around, and swampy ground where live-oaks grew, melancholy, festooned with Florida moss. The old slave quarters, disused except as kennels, were still standing; the two-storied house had flights of wooden steps running up on each side, on to the wide wisteriaed porch, and wanted a coat of paint; and, within, rooms ran one into the other, hung with old portraits of dead Wilmots and de Frevilles; and darkies wandered around and talked their soft drawled speech.

Jon was happier than he had been since he landed in the New World three and a half years ago. In the mornings he sauntered with the dogs in the sunlight or tried to write poetry—for the two young Wilmots were busy. After the midday meal he rode with them or with Anne alone. In the evening he learned from her to play the ukulele before a wood fire lighted at sundown, or heard about cotton culture from Francis, with whom, since that moment of animosity, he was on the best of terms.

Between Anne and himself there was little talk; they had, as it were, resumed the silence which had fallen when they sat in the dark under the old Indian mound. But he watched her; indeed, he was always trying to catch the grave enticing look in her dark eyes. She more and more seemed to him unlike any girl he had ever known, quicker, more silent, and with more 'sand.' The days went on, in warm sun, and the nightly scent of wood smoke; and his holiday drew to an end. He could play the ukulele now, and they sang to it—negro spirituals, songs from "Rose Marie," and other immortal works. The last day came, and dismay descended on Jon. To-morrow, early, he was going back to his peaches at Southern Pines! That afternoon, riding with her for the last time, the silence was almost unnatural, and she did not even look at him. Jon went up to change, with panic in his heart. He knew now that he wanted to take her back with him, and he thought he knew that she did not want to come. How he would miss watching for those eyes to be fixed on him! He was thirsty with the wish to kiss her. He went down moodily, and sat in a long chair before the wood fire, pulling a spaniel's ears and watching the room darken. Perhaps she wouldn't even come for a last singsong. Perhaps there would be nothing more but dinner and an evening *à trois;* not even a chance to say he loved her and be told that she didn't love him. And he thought, miserably: 'It's my fault—I'm a silent fool; I've missed all my chance.'

The room darkened till there was nothing but firelight, and the spaniel went to sleep. Jon, too, closed his eyes. It was as if he could wait better, thus—for the worst. When he opened them she was standing in front of him with the ukuleles in her hands.

"Do you want to play, Jon?"

"Yes," said Jon, "let's play. It's the last time"; and he took his ukulele.

She sat down on the rug before the fire, and began to tune hers. Jon slipped down beside the spaniel and began to tune his. The spaniel got up and went away.

"What shall we sing?"

"I don't want to sing, Anne. You sing; I'll just accompany."

She didn't look at him! She would not look at him! It was all up! What a fool he'd been!

Anne sang. She sang a crooning phrase—the call over the mountains, from "Rose Marie." Jon plucked his strings, and the tune plucked his heart. She sang it through. She sang it again, and her eyes slid round. God! She *was* looking at him. She mustn't see that he knew she was! It was too good—that long dark look over the ukulele. Between him and her were her ukulele and his own. He dropped the beastly thing. And, suddenly shifting along the floor, he put his arm round her. Without a word she drooped her head down against his shoulder, as when they sat under the Indian mound. He bent his cheek down to her hair. It smelled, as it had then, of hay. Then, just as she had screwed her face round in the moonlight, she turned it to him now. This time Jon kissed her lips.

Garden Valedictory

By Edith Wharton

I will not say that you are dead, but only
Scattered like seed upon the autumn breeze,
  Renewing life where all seemed locked and lonely,
  Stored in shut buds and inarticulate trees,

So that this earth, this meaningless earth, may yet
  Regain some sense for me, because a word
  You spoke in passing trembles in the jet
    Of the frail fountain in my garden-close,
  Because you stopped one day before this rose,
Or I can hear you in the migrant bird
  Throating goodbye along the lime-tree aisle,
    And feel your hand in mine, and breathe awhile.